

HISTORY OF ST. BARBARA'S PARISH,

POWELL, WYO., 1908 - 1932.

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The history of the church of St. Barbara dates back to the very earliest settlement of the Shoshone government reclamation project. With the earliest homesteaders coming in 1908, were a few families of the catholic faith. The beautiful Powell valley that we see to-day was then but a salt sage desert, and there were but a few homestead cabins to dot the landscape.

Mr and Mrs Charles E. Robinson, who came from Iowa to reside on a homstead a mile north of Powell, were loyally associated with the early organization work of the church here. It was at their home that Mass was celebrated for two years.

Coming out to Powell in the summer of 1908, Mr Robinson met Father N.J. Endres on the train and discussed with him the possibility of his coming to Powell in his travels through the Big Horn basin, and so it was arranged that he would visit Powell once a month on week days. The first Mass in Powell was celebrated by Father Endres in the Fall of 1908.

Father Endres, who had entered upon his work in the Big Horn basin but a few months previous, then maintained his head quarters at Cody. He attempted to cover the entire northwestern Wyoming area between the Big Horn mountains and the Yellowstone Park, but it was slow work, and with the road system found here and the transportation facilities of that day, Father Endres could make but infrequent visits to any one locality. He would cover much of the country on horseback. He had his own horse, which he would ride to such localities as Meeteetse, but the train service through the Big Horn basin was much used by him. Later on came the automobile, but it was a long time before Father Endres could avail himself of this means of transportation, due to the poor roads in all directions.

Father Endres soon found a growing group of catholics in the pioneer settlement Powell. The Robinson home became inadequate to house the families who came to Mass, so plans were made for the construction of a church building.

It was on July 20, 1910, that the first frame church building of St. Barbara's parish was dedicated. It was built at a cost of \$3500.00. It/

It had been planned to have Bishop Keane, of the Diocese of Cheyenne, present for the dedication, but sickness prevented. In his absence the dedicatory sermon was preached by the Rev. Father Ignatius of Syracuse, New York. A large congregation of pioneer catholics and non-catholics crowded the splendid little church building, which was then considered to be quite an improvement in this pioneer village and a source of great joy to all catholics.

The newspaper account of that dedication, appearing in the columns of the Powell Tribune said among other things, that "it was only fitting and proper that to Father Endres should fall the honor of actually dedicating the church, for to him in a very large measure is due the credit of having been instrumental in securing the first church building ever erected in Powell. He has made possible not only a splendid church edifice, but under his guidance and inspiration the congregation has forged steadily to the front alike in membership and in comparative standing among the catholic organizations of the state."

Others of the catholic clergy were present at this historic dedication in 1910. The service marked an epoch in the church history of Powell and the entire Big Horn basin.

But it was not long in the busy progress of Powell before the little frame church became inadequate to house the increasing number of those of the catholic faith coming into the community, and even back in pioneer days it was realized that the day was not far distant when another and larger church of a more permanent type would need to be constructed.

It was in the busy, booming days just after the World war that Father Endres found that he was unable to administer to all the developing and growing communities of the Big Horn basin. It was decided that his efforts should be confined to the southern half of the basin country, with headquarters at Thermopolis, while a new priest should be stationed at Powell to minister to the catholics in Powell, Lovell, Cody and Meeteetse.

In December, 1919, the first resident priest of St. Barbara's parish arrived to take up the work in the field assigned him. He was the Rev. Father B. Schneiders, a native of Holland, who but a short time previously arrived in the United States. He served a short pastorate at Kemmerer before being/

being assigned to his new field at Powell. A residence had not yet been built as a home for the priest, so for a time Father Schneiders occupied a room in the Virgil Orland cottage just to the rear of the church.

On the 20th of June, 1920, the Most Rev. Patrick A. McGovern, Bishop of the Diocese of Cheyenne, made a trip to the Big Horn basin and to Powell, to administer the sacrament of confirmation to a class of nineteen. He also confirmed ten at Lovell and four at Cody during that trip. The number of catholic families in the community had increased to the point that there was much talk of a new church building, and the Bishop, together with Father Schneiders and Father Endres, gave the matter at that time much consideration. The plan proposed was to build a new church the following summer.

In his sermon preached at the confirmation service that Sunday, Bishop McGovern spoke of the large increase in the catholic population about Powell. At that time it seemed to him that the new church at Powell should be designed of sufficient proportions to accommodate the third largest catholic congregation in the state. In his advice about a proposed new building, he advocated either frame, brick or stone. He did not approve of any imitation material such as concrete. He said that imitation stone was contrary to the highest ideals in church building. He did not advocate the church going into debt to any considerable extent for a new church, believing that the congregation of St. Barbara's church build only such a building as they were able to pay for.

But it did not fall to the lot of Father Schneiders to further the plans of the new church building. The Rev. John Spillane, an Irish priest who had been stationed at Rock Springs, came to Powell the first week in February, 1922, to take up the work as left to him by Father Schneiders, who was transferred to Casper.

In June, 1923, a new rectory was completed at a cost of \$1948.90.

In 1924, the Yellowstone National Park was added as a mission.

In October, 1926, the Lovell mission was transferred to the newly formed parish of Greybull.

For ten years the catholic people of /

of Powell labored to provide the necessary funds for the erection of a new church. In the early part of 1932, ground was broken for the new building. On Thursday, September, 22, 1932, the Most Rev. Patrick A. McGovern, D.D., Bishop of Cheyenne, before a gathering of clergy and laity from all parts of Wyoming and Montana, dedicated the beautiful new St. Barbara's church at Powell. The dedication ceremony, besides being one of the outstanding ecclesiastical events of Northern Wyoming and attracting over a score of priests, took on the nature of a civic celebration with prominent laymen, both catholic and non-catholic, speaking at the banquet which followed the religious rites.

The new church was erected by the Rev. John Spillane at a cost of over \$20,000. Final completion of the interior of the new edifice will place the total cost at approximately \$25,000. The new church on the outside measures 90 feet long and 34 feet wide. Added to this is the sacristy at the rear, which is 12 x 12 feet. The building is of brick and terra cotta. The seating capacity of the church is now about 275, but as many as 400 could be easily accommodated. The pews and interior appointments are of a beautiful hard-wood finish. The building is all paid for. The Contractor for St. Barbara's Church was Mr Charles Schmerber, of Cody, Wyoming, and the Architect Mr Louis Schmerber, a son of the contractor.

Bishop McGovern, speaking at the ceremony, paid a tribute to the accomplishment of Father Spillane, and gave the congregation full credit for the part it played in the erection of the church. The Bishop said that the edifice would do credit to a city much larger in size and to a much larger congregation.

The following priests were present for the ceremonies:

The Rev. William Shert, Kemmerer, Wyo., the Rev. James McBride, Pine Bluffs, Wyo., The Rev. J.J. O'Connor, Torrington, Wyo., the Rev. John Henry, Superintendent of St. Joseph's Orphanage, Torrington, Wyo. the Rev. Daniel Deherty, Lander, Wyo., The Rev. A.C. Zuercher, S.J., Riverton, Wyo., the Rev. N.J. Endres, Thermopolis, Wyo., The Rev. John Brady, Buffalo, Wyo., the Rev. John McDevitt, J.C.D., Monarch, Wyo., the Rev. John O'Connor, Ph.D., Carroll College, Helena, Mont.; the Rev. William Spillane, Glasgow, Mont.; the Rev. John Molyneaux, Red Lodge, Mont.; the Rev. Albert Foley, Forsyth, Mont., the Rev. John Higgins, Billings, Mont.; the Rev. D. J. Dineen, Billings, Mont.; and the Rev. J. Connolly, Geradine, Mont.

Attorney Tom Shea of Cody, Wyo., was toast-
-master at the banquet which followed the dedication.
Other speakers included Bishop McGovern; Mayor David
E. Powers of Powell, the Rev. J. J. O'Connor of Torrington,
Wyo., and the Rev. D. J. Dineen of Billings. Montana